**Social Science Research in the Nile 2 Project - An Overview (Draft 1) PLEASE COMMENT/DISAGREE/ETC!**

*Livelihoods*: In order to understand how RMS may affect” economic and livelihood benefits” (from proposal) or to determine the “economic, livelihood and agricultural productivity potential of integrated water, nutrient, fertility and seed technology management” we need a thorough assessment of the current livelihood strategies, and the constraints and well as opportunities for changes in land-use practices in the sites. While we currently have an overview of what farmers’ land use patterns are, we do not yet have an in-depth understanding of what *shapes* their decisions (perceptions of RWM interventions, land tenure, gender, social networks, off-farm opportunities, remittances, access to markets, inputs, value and use of livestock, value of trees and experience with agroforestry, to name a few). Each site will involve a specific mix of issues specific to the site characteristics. Qualitative work in the field needs to focus on which factors are most important for achieving the goals of RWM interventions. It is possible that the factors affecting livelihood improvements may be very different from those which affect improved soil and water conservation. In other words, we need to assess farmers’ perceptions of these factors as well as their views on whether they are willing to adopt certain practices that may not have an immediate livelihood benefit.

In these site locations, we should look at differences between farmers at different micro-agro-ecological zones as well as differences among farmers within zones according to a variety of socio-economic factors (land size, household size, livelihood capitals, etc).

Each partner is interested in collecting information on its specific area of focus, whether it is the role of institutions, the ways farmers manage their livestock, the way they integrate (or do not) trees on farm, their perception and experience of RWM strategies, etc. I hope that the socio-economic work can address all these interests so multiple teams do not go out in the field and collect data which is overlapping. Qualitative research in the sites is needed to fill out the picture on livelihoods and farmers’ decision-making and perceptions. It can involve a mix of methods from focus group discussions, key informant interviews, participant-observation and the analysis of any and all available secondary data (census material, grey literature if any, etc). Fieldwork can be carried out by both staff in the project in combination with partners. The degree to which we need to gather quantitative data needs to be discussed further. I would like to avoid a large survey as I think the areas had already been surveyed through the census and living standards survey. However, each team member might need some specific quantitative data and we should make up a list of what those data are.

I have cut and pasted some methods and types of data that IRLI and IWMI are interested in collecting in specific areas of the project. I have highlighted areas that seem to me to present possibilities for overlap and suggest that we figure out a way in which perhaps a social science student or team can collect this specific information in tandem with the researchers who are collecting and analyzing data on biophysical/agricultural/livestock management.

From Amare’s synopsis:

The methodologies can be implemented for the livestock management assessment as well as feeding strategie

i) Stratifying the study systems into landscapes and use those strata as sample frame and draw sufficient size of sample farm households for a household survey

ii) Undertaking key informants interview and field observations to triangulate information collected through structured questionnaire

iii) Clustering the sample farmers into livelihood typology ( can be participatory wealth ranking, or can be GDP approaches) for the analysis

iv) Critically reviewing of secondary information from previous works, on the linkage between different feeding strategies and rain water use efficiencies, livelihood capital and ecosystem services

iv) Calculating gross profit margin and understand if the economic performance meets production objectives NEEDS ECONOMIST HERE

v) Critically reviewing of secondary information from previous works, particularly, on the implication of the current livestock management system on water use efficiencies and livelihood capital

From Matthew/Birhanu MSc student concept note

1. Review of exiting RWM practices/ technologies in the study region and any planned activities. This can be achieved by consulting the regional water and agricultural bureau, as well as Woreda experts, and from published and unpublished documents.
2. Field visit should be undertaken to physically observe water harvesting and land improvement structures, and interventions.
3. Questionnaires and group discussions should be implemented to deduce farmers perceptions of existing RWM interventions (i.e. what works and what doesn’t and why) and what they think might be successful future options
4. Configuration and application of a suitable disaggregated rainfall-runoff model to provide insights into key hydrological processes and the catchment water budget

*Institutions*: In addition to the above, the socio-economic work should also focus on institutions. What is the level of woreda engagement in the sites? What interventions have been targeted in the past and what is their success or failure rate? How does institutional presence (or lack thereof) and type of engagement affect farmers’ decisions (food aid, access to inputs, subsidies, etc). What local level institutions of systems of collective action/management exist and how do they operate and what is the impact on farmers’ strategies (local irrigation systems, user committees, the church, funeral associations, etc. ). Again, on methods, there can be a combination of FGDs, key informant interviews, etc. This work on institutions should complement not overlap with that of ODI so we should be careful to map out what each team is doing on institutions.

*How to carry out above work*

Alemayehu and I talked to members of the geography and sociology and social anthropology departments at Addis Ababa University yesterday (in addition to Ossrea). All are quite happy to collaborate if the work falls within acceptable topics for the disciplines. We first discussed the possibility of having a masters’ student work on the project and then, when I discovered that the masters’ programs have been shortened to 18 months, leaving a very short window for fieldwork, I asked about Ph.D. students. Each department has Ph.D. students and I think having a Ph.D. or two in the field would be an enormous asset. They will be more expensive than masters’ students but I think better qualified and would have more time to devote to the work. I need to continue discussions to find out how expensive support of Ph.D. work would be and the ways in which the work would be managed and funded.